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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 001736

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/06/2016  
TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)  
SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: SACA TIES FMLN TO POLICE MURDERS

Classified By: DCM Michael A. Butler, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In violent July 5 protests at the University of El Salvador (UES), one or more snipers associated with radical leftist protesters assassinated two Civilian National Police (PNC) officers from the PNC's elite riot-control unit (PNC/UMO), and wounded at least 10 other officers. President Saca has accused the opposition Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) of complicity in the killings, and vowed to lodge protests with the UN and other international bodies. Although it seems clear that the FMLN fomented protest that they fully expected to turn violent, it is possible that elements that the Frente thought under its influence actually acted on their own. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The protests were held ostensibly in opposition to rising electricity costs and increases in bus fares due to escalating oil prices. (Note: Retail electricity rates and bus fares are controlled by the Government. Electricity rates are adjusted every six months to reflect changes in underlying costs in a competitive market; rates rose 14 percent on June 10. End note.) Masked militants associated with the Popular Youth Bloc (BPJ), Salvadoran Revolutionary Student Brigade (BRES), and other radical leftist organizations rioted outside the University of El Salvador, vandalizing businesses and police vehicles and firing into the air. As police deployed tear gas to disperse rioters at approximately 10:30 a.m., one or more snipers armed with high-caliber automatic weapons began shooting police officers, and also fired on circling police helicopters. Two officers, 32-year-old Miguel Angel Rubi Argueta and 26-year-old Jose Pedro Misael Navarrete, died immediately from wounds to the head and chest, respectively. A wounded police helicopter pilot succeeded in making an emergency landing of his craft, which was damaged by heavy gunfire from campus. UES faculty member Herberth Rivas was wounded in the shoulder during a faculty meeting; UES authorities afterwards alleged that the fire had come from a police helicopter, but police responded that the helicopters carried no weapons, and that in any event the bullet hole's location in the meeting room's glass panels indicated that it had originated from where protesters fired on police. (Note: The PNC/UMO detachment employed no lethal force at any time during the incident, and were armed only with rubber bullets, tear gas, plus personal sidearms that for the most part remained holstered. End note.)

¶3. (C) Leading dailies La Prensa Grafica and El Diario de Hoy featured front-page photos of an M-16-armed shooter identified as Jose Mario Belloso Castillo firing on police, with the assistance of an individual identified as Luis Antonio Herrador Funes; both are reportedly FMLN and BPJ members. The 37-year-old Herrador Funes was later apprehended at his home in San Marcos; Belloso Castillo remains at large. Channel Four television reporter Kathya

Carranza reported that alleged shooter Bellosso Castillo had been seen later in the evening at the Legislative Assembly in the company of FMLN Alternate Deputy Ana Guadalupe Erazo (a former BRES militant, and Popular Social Bloc/BPS leader) and hardliner FMLN Deputy Jose Salvador Arias; this report remains unconfirmed at present. At approximately 11:00 p.m., police from the Rapid Reaction Group (PNC/GRP) entered the University campus in search of suspects and evidence, and found explosives, M-16 magazines, camouflage military uniforms, as well as ski masks and hammer-and-sickle-emblazoned red kerchiefs of the type used by protesters to mask their identities. Classes at the University of El Salvador have been temporarily suspended.

¶4. (C) President Saca publicly charged FMLN involvement in the slayings, and pledged to take complaints to the United Nations and Organization of American States (OAS); Saca views the armed attacks as having breached the terms of the 1992 Peace Accords of Chapultepec that ended the nation's 12-year armed conflict. All political parties--with the notable exception of the FMLN--strongly condemned the killings; FMLN Legislative Assembly delegation chief Salvador Sanchez Ceren dreamed up a fanciful scenario in which police snipers, Army "helicopter gunships", and Air Force A-37 jet fighter aircraft had mounted a concerted attack on peaceful demonstrators, and that police had somehow become victims of the Government's own massive firepower. Director of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH) Beatrice Carrillo weakly lamented the police deaths as "unfortunate", and blandly opined that their murders pointed up the need to review increases in electricity rates and bus fares. (Note: Carrillo interjected herself into negotiations with prisoners during a violent December 2002 riot at Mariona Prison; after prisoners killed two PNC hostages, Carrillo dismissively conveyed that police deaths were not her concern, and that the PNC "could look out for themselves". End note.)

¶5. (C) Ambassador and DCM attended a late-afternoon July 6 briefing by President Saca, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lainez, Minister of Gobernacion Figueroa and National Police Director Avila. Although Saca and Figueroa spoke of the shooter,s and his accomplice,s ties to a "left-wing party", a video presentation of the evidence collected by police directly fingered the FMLN. Avila told the gathering (which included the diplomatic corps and national deputies) that the shooter and his accomplice had been arrested several times during violent demonstrations, only to be sprung by FMLN deputies. (Avila demonstrated photographs of the two during protests outside the Casa Presidencial and along the Comalapa airport road, which has been blocked several times in recent months by FMLN-affiliated groups.) Avila also suggested at least one trip by the shooter to Venezuela; stated that the police helicopter had been fired upon about a minute before the murder of the police; and added that one of the injured policemen had been wounded by a home-made grenade.

¶6. (C) During the briefing, Saca noted that police had responded with care even after the killings, refusing to follow the shooter in hot pursuit into the university out of fear of injuring students. He added that the police search of the university came later, and resulted in the discovery of a literal "armory of arms and explosives." Saca promised that the GOES "would not fall victim to provocations", but would act "with firmness and prudence."

¶7. (U) Ambassador attended the July 6 memorial service for the fallen officers. A visibly emotional Avila stated just prior to the later briefing that the Ambassador,s presence "meant a lot to us."

¶8. (C) The GOES moved quickly July 6 to pass anti-terrorism measures through the legislature under expedited measures. Christian Democratic Party (PDC) leader Rodolfo Parker told DCM that the Assembly would form two special commissions following the shooting, one to investigate the crime, the other to study anti-terrorist legislation. He pledged that the latter commission would complete its work with passage of legislation within fifteen days.

19. (C) COMMENT: There is little doubt that the FMLN orchestrated yesterday's protests; just last week, the FMLN's Erazo and other FMLN officials made public calls for protests over electricity rates and bus fares, and the BRES, BPJ, and BPS are widely acknowledged to be under the sway of the FMLN's hardline leadership. All indications point to an ambush that had been carefully planned beforehand by a trained marksman. There seems little doubt that the FMLN leadership fully expected the demonstration to turn violent; whether they actually planned the police officers, murders, or saw elements of the demonstrators they thought under their control act on their own, is less certain. END COMMENT.  
Barclay